

Testimony of

Julie Evans Starr, Executive Director
Connecticut Commission on Aging

Select Committee on Aging

February 16, 2010

Good morning and thank you for this opportunity to comment on a number of bills before you today.

As you know, the Connecticut Commission on Aging is the nonpartisan state agency devoted to preparing Connecticut for a significantly changed demographic and enhancing the lives of the present and future generations of older adults. For sixteen years, the Commission has served as an effective leader in statewide efforts to promote choice, independence and dignity for Connecticut's older adults and persons with disabilities. I'd like to thank this committee for its ongoing leadership and collaboration in these efforts.

In these difficult budget times, research-based initiatives, statewide planning efforts, vision and creative thinking are all needed. The Connecticut Commission on Aging stands ready to assist our state in finding solutions to our fiscal problems, while keeping commitments to critical programs and services.

***Senate Bill 103: An Act Concerning Access to Comprehensive Factual Information
Regarding Long-Term Care Facilities***
~CoA Supports

This proposal empowers nursing home residents, potential residents and their families by providing them with information about on-duty staff, staff-patient ratios, and the facilities' quality ratings as determined by the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. The Commission on Aging supports all efforts to educate and inform individuals who are seeking long-term care services. Facilities in Connecticut can and should provide comprehensive, clear information to help families make decisions about their loved ones' long-term care options. The Commission also believes that making this information publicly available and accessible will incent providers to take action to improve quality. Ideally, these efforts would take place in conjunction with affirmative incentives to promote a "culture change" promoting and honoring person-centered care in nursing facilities. We would like to direct you to the information that is provided on the long term care website, www.ct.gov/longtermcare,



as a resource for the information that is available to residents, future residents and their family members about the types of care that is available to them. We would encourage the use of this website to host the new information proposed in this bill. This website was created and is maintained the Commission on Aging in partnership with the Long-Term Care Advisory Council, the Office of Policy and Management and InfoLine 2-1-1 and is available to individuals 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

House Bill 5111: An Act Concerning the Alzheimer's Respite Care Program

~CoA Supports

In Connecticut there are approximately 70,000 constituents who have Alzheimer's disease. The Alzheimer's Respite Care program allows many people with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia to remain at home in the care of family members and loved ones. Those caregivers in Connecticut provide over \$1 billion of unpaid care to those individuals. One of the 15 major recommendations of the Long-Term Care Needs Assessment, authorized by the CGA, is to "Provide Support for informal caregivers". Research clearly indicates that supporting informal caregivers with programs such as the Alzheimer's Respite Care Program is critical to keeping individuals out of nursing homes; it keeps caregivers healthy, and allows families to utilize various options in respite allowing for more cost effective solutions. The program currently has a waiting list of over 300 individuals, something that has not happened in the history of the program. This program remains closed to everyone who is in dire need of these grant funds. The Alzheimer's Respite Care Program saves the state money by helping individuals with Alzheimer's disease remain at home instead of going to institutions and by helping their caregivers continue to provide their important support. The Connecticut Commission on Aging supports full funding of the program, thus allowing the Alzheimer's Respite Program be opened and individuals begin receiving the much needed respite that they require.

House Bill 5112: An Act Reducing the Individual Contribution Under the State-Funded Home-Care Program for the Elderly

~CoA Supports

Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders (CHCPE) is a vital investment for the people of Connecticut and their families. According to the Department of Social Services there was an estimated **\$101 million savings for the state in FY '08** by avoiding nursing home placements. The CHCPE is an investment for the state; it provides great savings to the state in avoided costs of institutional care.

The CT Commission on Aging supports the reduction of the cost share from 15% to 5% for the Home Care Program. As is estimated by the three CHCPE access agencies, (CT Community Care, Inc., Agency on Aging of South Central CT, and Southwestern CT Agency on Aging) 4,940 state-funded elders will be required to pay 15% of their services at an average cost of \$1,013 per month that is approximately \$152 a month. 82% of the individuals are currently living below 200% of the poverty level. This means that their average monthly income is \$1,390 and average annual assets that total \$10,147. There are several other factors that will impact these individuals ability to pay the monthly flexing cost sharing of the program including rent, utilities, and medication co-payments which averages \$200 monthly.

The Commission on Aging also recommends annualizing payments to the participants of the CHCPE. Currently as a result of PA 09-5, enrollees pay 15% of their monthly costs. These costs can vary considerably month to month, as care needs change. By making this small recommended change enrollees would pay the same amount each month. This would ensure that the participants are able to budget their monthly payments similar to your gas or electric bills and then at the end of the year any necessary adjustments will be made.

In these difficult budget times, research-based initiatives, statewide planning efforts, vision and creative thinking are all needed. The Connecticut Commission on Aging stands ready to assist our state in finding solutions to our fiscal problems, while keeping commitments to critical programs and services.

Thank you again for this opportunity to comment. As always, please contact us with any questions about this issue or other aging-related issues. It's our pleasure to serve as an objective, nonpartisan resource to you.

